

NFAC 4564-78//

Executive Registry
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20 OCT 1978

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

VIA: Deputy Director, National Foreign Assessment Center

FROM:

Acting Director of Scientific Intelligence

SUBJECT: The Kyshtym Nuclear Accident

REFERENCE: Your Memorandum to DD/NFAC, dated
17 October 1978

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1. Action Required: None. It is recommended that we should not try to release an unclassified version of the Kyshtym nuclear accident.

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2. Background:

Your Nuclear Intelligence Panel suggested that we should consider releasing an unclassified version of Kyshtym nuclear reactor accident. The purpose would be to lay to rest the erroneous, misleading and at times greatly exaggerated stories on this incident in the public press. The basis for these stories are the public writings of Zhores Medvedev, a Russian scientist emigre, and some low quality intelligence reports released through the FOIA process.

While Medvedev's writings are undoubtedly based on events related to the Kyshtym accident, his conclusions and some of his suppositions are clearly in error and

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greatly exaggerated. The intelligence reports are, for the most part, exaggerated or whimsical hearsay of the type that accompanies any major accident. The result of all of this is that there is now in the public domain the impression that Soviets suffered a massive explosion in a nuclear waste storage facility (a scientifically incredible event) resulting in widespread death, destruction and contamination.

Issues

Because of the intense debate currently going on in the US on the safety of nuclear power and the problem of long term storage of radioactive waste, there is the potential for the CIA to get caught in the middle of this one.

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3. Recommendation: There is currently no pressure on the Agency to release information on the Kyshtym incident, and for the time being it would appear that we